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## **PART III: ANTICIPATED FUTURE DEVELOPMENT AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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This section assesses opportunities and constraints for growth in the Eastern Sector and lays out recommendations for enhancing the climate for new development in the area. At the same time, these ideas seek to protect and enhance viable existing residential, commercial and industrial uses.

Growth in the Eastern Sector has been sluggish over the past 20 years due in part to aging infrastructure and the lure of development opportunities to the west. In addition, poor housing conditions and a low skilled labor force have done little to attract major growth. Overall, the sector's population will increase over the next 20 years, but at a much slower rate than the City as a whole. The Eastern Sector, however, covers a large and diverse area with varying prospects for future development.

Though home ownership is highest north of the Eastex Freeway, population has been declining steadily, the population is growing older and vacancy rates are high. It is likely that the lack of connectivity to other areas as well as insufficient residential retail and amenities is driving younger populations to other areas of the City. This northernmost area has a suburban/rural character and both light industrial and residential infill opportunities are abundant.

Though some undeveloped properties exist in the central section of the study area, redevelopment of the area's numerous industrial sites will be key to revitalization. In fact, multifamily housing and commercial construction are already gaining momentum due to a number of factors including renewed interest in Downtown's eastern edge and the Buffalo Bayou Master Plan. Developers and homeowners are taking advantage of the area's close proximity to the central business district and major freeways. Sites that were once industrial are being developed as moderate to high-income housing. Density here in the east end, south of Buffalo Bayou, will most likely increase to meet demand and accommodate rising land values.

Farther south, population has been increasing and vacancy rates are low. The population is much younger here and much of the growth is probably due to migration from Central America. Here, development is not keeping pace with population growth, perhaps due to the area's low median income and overall low educational attainment. However, the recent Gulf Gate Mall redevelopment illustrates that a significant market for retail and services exists in the southern portion of the study area.

Many of the jobs in the sector are industrial and will remain industrial due to the presence of the Ship Channel. It is considered the biggest port in the U.S. in terms of tonnage and the Port of Houston Authority is one of the City's largest employment/activity centers. A high level of industrial activity associated with the Port is concentrated along Buffalo Bayou, which extends along the eastern section of the study area. Although most of the area freeways serving the port are adequate, the major thoroughfares in the Eastern Sector linking the port to the rest of the community are inadequate to handle the increasing truck traffic to and from the port. These thoroughfares include Clinton Drive, Navigation, Wayside, Lockwood, Broadway and Market Street.

While some large petrochemical plants have expanded, the small, light industry that has traditionally anchored these Eastern Sector communities has been moving west to areas with better access and cheaper land. Poor transportation linkages and lack of available land mean significant growth for these businesses will be difficult. Areas further to the north in which land is more readily available also suffer from weak transportation linkages and poor access by the labor force.

Low educational and income levels throughout the sector pose additional challenges. Despite these issues, neighborhood participation in Super Neighborhood activities and community planning efforts is high. Of the eighteen Super Neighborhoods in the Eastern Sector, (11) 61% have Neighborhood Councils. In comparison to Super Neighborhoods in the City only (41) 46% had Super Neighborhood Councils. The study area also has civic associations registered with the City Planning and Development

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Department. Such high level of civic interest from the community is a significant asset that can spur growth and improve its quality of life.

The Greater East End Management District can play a crucial role in addressing issues related to economic development in a large portion of the study area. For over five years, the District has been serving as a catalyst for new development activity in a 16 square mile area extending east from Downtown along Harrisburg to the City's boundaries. The District is poised to tap into the vibrant growth on the eastern edge of Downtown following the construction of Minute Maid Park, Brown Convention Center Extension, Hilton Hotel and Toyota Center. While the entire Sector still lags behind in economic recovery compared to the rest of the City, the Management District is using some significant tools like beautification and economic surveys to attract residential and commercial development and retain the area's rich culture and character.

Super Neighborhood Action Plans in the Eastern Sector can also play a role in revitalizing the area. These Super Neighborhood Action Plans propose a wide range of improvement projects including street resurfacing, demolition of abandoned property, landscaping, sidewalk improvements, rail grade separation, construction of new multi-service centers and expansion of existing facilities, speed humps, drainage, traffic signals, more parks, affordable housing, fire stations and job development programs.

The Harrisburg corridor is poised to benefit from several large-scale projects currently in the planning stages. The Buffalo Bayou Plan East Sector (East End) proposes to enhance the community image and create jobs. Other benefits would include increased opportunities for residential development, bikeways, boating facilities, parks and creation of signature features, focal points and tourism destinations. These improvements can easily complement the development likely to follow the extension of Light Rail Transit (LRT) from downtown along Harrisburg Avenue. The LRT will surely spur mixed-use higher density commercial and residential development because of increased access to downtown. Adequate investment and coordination related to these two efforts could provide stimulus for the entire sector.

Another potential engine for economic development is US 90, planned to cut through the northern section of the study area. This corridor is currently underdeveloped and, therefore this highway project, provides a great opportunity for future commercial and industrial development to the north east of the City.

Further to the south, the proposed Hobby Airport Enhancement Plan provides another opportunity for spurring economic recovery in the Eastern Sector. Although the proposed plan south of the study area only invokes the possibility of extending the concept north to the study area, the potential economic benefits of the plan are enormous and this plan can be replicated along Broadway north of I-45.

The following recommendations provide the framework for developing recommendations or strategies to revitalize the economy of the Eastern Sector:

## **Recommendations**

To guide anticipated future development, the following two strategies for fostering a positive climate for economic development and revitalization are needed:

1. Set citywide and regional priorities for infrastructure, mobility and environmental problems (i.e. brownfields, flooding, etc.)
2. Create a coalition of stakeholders from the study area to develop a broad plan for the area based on extensive public involvement and community consensus that considers its significant physical elements, relates to citywide and regional development trends, and takes into account social and economic factors. (A dialogue should be undertaken with major property owners, relevant governmental agencies and others to further define the issues and determine what type of organizational structure would be most beneficial for such a coalition.) The plan should include priorities and implementation strategies.

Setting citywide and regional priorities is an essential strategy for achieving growth in the area. The CIP could be an important tool for establishing these priorities and for implementing planning actions that

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will change the development climate in this area. Integrating an area-wide plan based on community consensus with capital improvement programming could greatly benefit the process of setting priorities, coordinating capital investments and leveraging existing investments for greater impact. In addition, several regional and citywide plans, including the Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan, the Harris County Flood Control District watershed plans, Harris-Galveston Coastal Subsidence District Plan, Metro's South Corridor Study and long and short term State transportation plans could be used to determine priorities and coordinate plans and actions.

The broad area-wide plan would be a framework for decision-making that would include a set of recommendations for its implementation. These recommendations would address issues of development/redevelopment, accessibility and infrastructure, environmental constraints, neighborhood conservation and improvement and commercial corridor development. Achieving public consensus on goals and objectives for development will be an essential component of the planning process.

## **New Development/Redevelopment**

Opportunities for new development or redevelopment in the Eastern Sector already exist. The following actions can build on these opportunities.

### **Land Use**

- Create transition areas between residential and industrial land uses by encouraging areas of appropriate mixed uses such as commercial/office and industrial/commercial.
- Encourage mixed development (residential/commercial) along Harrisburg. Such development along this corridor would provide the appropriate/desired development mix needed to implement The Buffalo Bayou Plan and the Metro Solutions Plan.
- Include affordable housing in the proposed development mix. The area has numerous

pockets of developable land infill. This effort could be achieved through the Land Assembly Redevelopment Authority recently created by the City and through a program that would offer incentives to neighborhood industries to relocate to industrial parks with freeway access.

- Encourage residential development on large parcels of undeveloped land northeast of Tidwell and West Little York.
- Create parks along the Bayous. Buffalo Bayou, Greens Bayou, and several other small bayous drain the Eastern Sector. These drainage corridors provide an excellent opportunity to develop parks that would enhance the quality of life within the Eastern Sector community and the City at large. Although the Buffalo Bayou Plan already addresses some park and drainage issues, the introduction of similar plans along the other bayous would provide added aesthetics that attract development and improve the quality of life.
- Promote commercial retail development along North Wayside where it intersects with Mount Houston, Little York, Tidwell and Crosstimbers.
- Develop a commercial corridor along Broadway north of I-45 to simulate the Hobby Airport Enhancement Plan proposed along Broadway south of I-45 and the Hobby Airport vicinity. Creating such a corridor would improve north-south mobility and attract new development.
- Encourage industrial development along Liberty Road. Liberty Road runs along the Union Pacific rail line and still has extensive tracts of land available for industrial development. Although there is industrial development along this corridor, growth has been very slow. TIRZ and/or other incentives can be used to attract investment.
- Use urban design elements to incorporate a historical theme along Harrisburg,

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highlighting its rich heritage. In 1826, John Richards Harris, a native of Missouri moved to Texas and founded the Town of Harrisburg, which later grew to be the Houston of today. Harris County was named after John Harris and Harrisburg served for a short time as capitol of the Republic of Texas. A 1998 economic development survey conducted by the Greater East End Management District also identified the area's historical heritage as one of the major attractors of business to the area.

- Promote conversion of inactive landfills to golf courses or other recreational uses. The Eastern Sector has two inactive landfills and has a potential for additional inactive landfills in the future. Areas with golf courses serve as magnets for high value development and enhancement to the community quality of life.
- Use urban design elements to create a visibly nautical theme along the Ship Channel. The significance of the Houston Ship Channel and the Port of Houston to the study area and the City cannot be overemphasized. Creating a nautical theme would help the community to recognize and appreciate the importance of the Port in the area.
- Promote creation of small industrial parks with freeway access to encourage small neighborhood industries to relocate to areas more compatible with their use. Some of the Eastern Sector's major transportation corridors such as US 90, Liberty Road and I-10 W, have access to the freeways and can still absorb several industrial parks. Should the small industrial parks scattered over the area relocate along major transportation corridors, they would provide additional land for housing or commercial development.
- Explore the possibility of using legal instruments available such as TIRZ, EZ and NEZ to encourage industrial development along strategic corridors such as Little York Road, North Wayside and US 90 Highway

and protect adjacent residential areas from commercial and industrial encroachment. Creating such incentives would provide investment leverage to potential developers.

- Encourage industrial development southeast of Broadway and south of SH 225.

### **Infrastructure/Mobility/Safety**

- Create dedicated trucking routes to minimize negative impacts of trucking on neighborhoods. Designated routes would be improved to handle large and heavy vehicles. Major Thoroughfares such as Clinton Drive, Liberty Road, Harrisburg, Wayside, Navigation, Lyons Street, 610 Loop, I-10 W, US 90, Maxey Road and Market Street are used heavily by truck traffic to and from the port. Such a designation would improve general mobility, traffic safety and help to channel the limited road infrastructure funds where they are most needed.
- Enhance roadways, underpasses and pedestrian walkways. Implement a streetscape improvement program similar to the \$2.7 million project funded largely by the Texas Department of Transportation in the entire Eastern Sector. Similar programs can be developed through Super-neighborhood Councils working in coordination with the City, County and State Department of Transportation.
- Improve safety around railroad tracks. This can be done by conducting an inventory of the rail crossings, collecting and analyzing train/pedestrian and auto accident data and then designing and implementing the necessary remedies.
- Coordinate existing security measures with industry to improve and protect the infrastructure surrounding the Port. In 2003, the Port of Houston Authority received \$1.8 million from Congressional Appropriations for Port security. It also received an additional \$4.37 million from the Office of Domestic Preparedness. The Port is seeking another

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\$13 million for a cohesive security program that will include surveillance and protection of the infrastructure. Extending port security to the surrounding neighborhoods would improve the quality of life and enhance development.

- Improve accessibility along key corridors and consider grade separation at major rail intersections. Building rail grade separations at major road intersections would improve mobility and minimize traffic gridlock.